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SUBJECT: ARAB-SOUTH AMERICA SUMMIT: BRAZIL LOSES CONTROL

REF: A. BRASILIA 1229

1B. BRASILIA 1230

1C. BRASILIA 1231

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES PHILLIP CHICOLA, REASONS 1.4 (b
& d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY and INTRODUCTION: Despite its confident demeanor going into the Arab-South America Summit, the GOB has stumbled in its handling, trying to manage an event involving heads of state when national interests are incongruent. It is proving to be beyond Itamaraty's ability. Perhaps the most embarrassing moment for President Lula was the sudden departure May 10 from Brasilia of President Kirchner who appeared to have reached his limit with Brazilian insensitivity to Argentine interests. Close behind was Brazilian Foreign Minister Amorim's inability to keep problematic political language out of the Summit Declaration which radical Arab participants had sought. The USG had earlier pointed out to the GOB the possible consequences of such language. While Itamaraty, desirous to be all things to all people, tried to reassure the USG that our concerns would be addressed, nonetheless, Amorim and company, as part of the effort to please their Arab guests, felt obliged to accept the Arab-drafted language. We also note that the only visible South American leader, besides Lula and Kirchner, is that master scene stealer, Hugo Chavez.

¶2. (C) The GOB has clearly lost control of the Summit which concludes Wednesday, and many pundits here are already questioning the value of the entire endeavor. While it is too early to determine the consequences of the chaotic Summit on Brazil's global leadership aspirations, Brazil's reputation has not been enhanced by it. End Comment

Kirchner Walks

¶3. (C) During the first day of the Arab-South America Summit May 10, President Lula and the Government of Brazil appear to have lost control of events. Most serious for Brazil was the abrupt May 10 departure of Argentine President Nestor Kirchner from Brasilia, standing up President Lula for a scheduled dinner and leaving a trail of recriminations in his wake. According to press reports, Kirchner felt the political purpose of the Summit had become "exhausted," although the final Summit Declaration issued Tuesday did contain language calling on both Argentina and Great Britain to reopen negotiations over the Falkland Islands. While Kirchner's anger with the politicized nature of the Summit and the attacks on non-attending countries may have been real, his keenest frustration was bilateral -- with Brazil. Weeks of controversy led by Argentine Foreign Minister Rafael Bielsa over Brazil's soaring trade surplus with Argentina, and Argentina's own efforts to remedy the commercial imbalance, boiled over during a "neuralgic" May 9 dinner with Kirchner, Lula, and Hugo Chavez, according to press reports. Reportedly, the straw that broke the camel's back was Brazil's decision not to assist Argentina in its negotiations with the IMF, as requested by the GOA.

¶4. (C) Kirchner's abandonment of the Summit could not have come at a worse time for President Lula, as the GOB's own ability to retaliate, in the midst of the highest profile international event ever held in the Brazilian capital, was severely constrained. While some senior Brazilian officials hinted at a "hardening" of Brazil's relations to its southern neighbor, an irritated Foreign Minister Celso Amorim and President Lula's Foreign Affairs Advisor Marco Aurelio Garcia sought, unconvincingly, to minimize the damage.

Arab Hardliners and Chavez Have Their Way

¶5. (C) Meanwhile, inside the Convention Center, Brazilian diplomacy appears to have taken a backseat to the Arab States and Venezuelan President Chavez. Frontpage headlines in Brazilian newspapers May 11 stated boldly that Israel and the United States were the Summit's targets, and numerous national statements made mention of both countries. Interrupting Iraqi President Jalal Talabani during his speech, Chavez shouted a rejection of the (U.S.-led) invasion of Iraq. His words, reportedly, were met by a "choking silence" from the other leaders. Summit Co-chair Algerian President Bouteflika retorted that friends of Iraq were friends of the Arab countries. However, he then sought to

conciliate Chavez: "We do not accept state occupations in any part of the world. Nevertheless, I do not believe there is a difference between the ideals of Presidents Chavez and Talabani." Later, according to reports, "with a smile on his face" Talabani rebuffed Chavez by saying (he) "needs to know more about the history" of Iraq.

16. (C) The GOB appears to have given way in every important instance. That there was something for almost every Arab state in the final Summit Declaration is well borne out. All evidence to the contrary, the Government of Sudan is praised for "facilitating international assistance to the humanitarian crisis in Darfur." Despite repeated Brazilian promises over many months that the Summit Declaration would not contain language inimical to Middle East peace efforts, the final text contains problematic paragraphs that existed in earlier declaration drafts. In addition to the demand that Israel withdraw to its June 4, 1967 frontiers, the declaration also calls on Israel to comply with the International Court of Justice July 2004 decision on dismantling the security wall. In its only specific mention of the United States, the Summit Declaration "Expresses profound concern with the unilateral sanctions imposed on Syria by the Government of the United States and considers the so-called 'Syria Accountability Act' a violation of the principles of international law and constitutes a transgression against the objectives and principles of the United Nations..."

17. (C) As contained in earlier drafts, the Summit Declaration calls for combating terrorism "in all its forms and manifestations" and calls for a United Nations conference "to study this phenomenon and to define terrorism as a crime." However, as the USG had feared the text also "Reaffirms the non-acceptance of foreign occupation and recognize the right of states and peoples to resist foreign occupation in accordance with the principles of international legality and in compliance with international humanitarian law."

18. (C) Comment: It appears the Summit has become exactly what the GOB assured the USG it wanted to avoid: an opportunity for the Arab states to criticize the U.S. and Israel. It has also been a disappointing effort towards achieving stronger economic and commercial ties between the two regions, the ostensive purpose of the Summit in the first place. Even while the Summit is in progress, at least three Arab delegations interested in purchasing Brazilian defense equipment reportedly were unable to get substantive audiences with Brazil Defense Minister/Vice President Jose Alencar who appears to have lost interest in his defense portfolio. An international spotlight -- if one were needed -- on intra-South American squabbles lays open Brazil's own 'tin ear' for the concerns of its smaller neighbors. Although the final Summit declaration calls for reform of the United Nations -- codewords for Brazil's blind ambition to obtain a permanent Security Council seat -- the inability of President Lula and the GOB to keep the cats herded while in Brasilia calls into question Brazil's ability as a leader of the "South" in the international community. Indeed, the overall tone of Brazilian media coverage ranges from reserved skepticism to strong criticism of the GOB's handling of the event, and questions the value of the initiative for Brazil in real terms

19. (C) Comment cont.: While it is too soon to say the Summit will backfire on Brazil's own global leadership and UN Security Council aspirations, at this stage it is certain that Brazil's cause was not enhanced. Emotions within GOB leadership will no doubt rise to the surface after the Summit (mercifully) ends May 11. We expect that when Brazilian commentators pronounce on the GOB's poor performance, Itamaraty will seek to blame the poor turnout of Arab leaders and the Summit's disappointing outcome on the United States. Never mind that Iraqi President Talabani was one of the few Arab leaders to show up in Brasilia.

Chicola